

StoryCorps Interview at the Chicago Public Library

Marcia Trawinski talks to her friend Dottie Gibson about how adaptive services that help the visually impaired read have improved over her lifetime.

Marcia Trawinski: What I've learned Over these 50, 66 years is that the library has changed and so my relationship has changed. When I was little I hated the library 'cause I'd see all these rooms and rooms of books and I couldn't get at them, they were just doorstops, and it made me very frustrated. And my friends would say, "Did you read the latest dah-dah-dah-" and I'd say "No!"

Dottie Gibson: You felt left out!

MT: Oh, I was left out totally. Even though I could eventually could catch up, which I did, because eventually they were recorded and eventually we got 'em, everyone else had finished that and moved on to another book by the time I got the book. So it was very distressing.

Since technology has come knocking we now have books that we can download the same way you would download them. What people can do on their smartphones - which means you *and* me for the first time! We can go to the downloadable list we can find very current books - and magazines- and literally download 'em to our smartphone. Which for me an iPhone is accessible and I can use, and I can read a new release at the same time you read a new release!

DG: On your iPhone!

MT: On my iPhone!

DG: Wow!

MT: Because for the first time I now have access to the same books *you* have access to

DG: Over time, how has the talking book center changed in the library? The actual center.

MT: Well, when I was a child, we never even *came* to the library that had talking books. That was a warehouse where we called for books and they sent them in the mail, and we sent equipment back and got equipment in the mail. So I never actually set foot in a library until they opened the talking book center here at the Harold Washington Library, and I can't remember how many years ago that was, but maybe 15, maybe more. And it gave me an opportunity for the first time to be face to face with the people who worked in the talking book center.

DG: Uhuh.

MT: It also gave me the opportunity to meet other patrons because unless I stumbled onto them, it was a very solitary arrangement. It was me and the post office. Now I knew other people who read other books. We got to meet we had actual book clubs that were for the talking book center, so for the first time I could discuss books with my friends just like a regular book club.

DG: Do you use other services at the library besides the talking book center?

MT: Well, as the library became more accessible and we moved into the computer age, one of the things the talking book center here did was actually provide rooms with what we call accessible equipment. Things you may have heard, where our computers talk - which we call screen readers and optical character recognition - and scanners so we can take a printed page, scan it and then have the computer read it. We could write things and then have them print, where the document you type would actually come out in braille.

So the talking book center was about books - and magazines - but it was also about accessing the world as other people got to access it in the library. Not only did that give us all the neat stuff that the internet and email and all the good things, it gave us access to the website for Harold Washington Library, the Chicago Public Library, any library information, other things going on. So I can participate in all kinds of programs at the library whether it's just the open to the public meetings or book meetings or topical meetings or issue meetings. I feel like for the first time I'm using this concrete building as well as using the books I get.